DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 174 CG 020 349

AUTHOR O'Leary, Virginia E.; Ickovics, Jeannette R.
TITLE Who Wants a Woman Boss? Only Those Who Have One.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (58th, Arlington, VA, April 9-12, 1987). Some pages contain light type.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior; Employed Women; *Employee Attitudes; *Employer Employee Relationship; Employers; *Job Satisfaction; Personality Traits; *Secretaries; *Sex Differences; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

While working women are still underrepresented in managerial, executive, and professional positions, there are increasing numbers of women occupying leadership roles. This study was conducted to examine female secretaries' evaluations of their bosses and of their jobs. Secretaries of 20 male and 20 female bosses evaluated their bosses on personality and behavioral dimensions and evaluated the extent to which certain qualities were present or absent in their jobs. T-tests computed on the secretaries' ratings of their satisfaction with their bosses and their jobs failed to reveal any significant differences between the secretaries of women and of men. The means for both measures, however, favored women bosses over men. Compared to secretaries of men, secretaries of women rated their tasks as significantly more worthwhile and reported that their bosses engaged in significantly more positive actions. The overall pattern of results suggests that women who work as secretaries for women bosses like both their bosses and their jobs. (NB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Virginia E. O'Leary
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED288174

CG020349

# Who Wants a Woman Boss?
## Only Those Who Have One

Virginia E. O'Leary
Boston University

Jeannette R. Ickovics
George Washington University

The United States Department of Labor reported last year that for the first time in history, more than fifty percent of adult women were in the workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 1986). It is becoming increasingly clear that the workforce of the 80's and beyond belongs to women as well as men. As the number of women in the workforce continues to expand, it is important to consider the extent to which sex and gender influence all aspects of employment--including performance and productivity, job satisfaction, relations with co-workers and overall quality of life in the workplace.

While working women are still grossly underrepresented in managerial, executive and professional positions, there are increasing numbers of women occupying leadership roles. And more likely than not, there will be a woman boss in all of our futures! Contrary to popular myth this may not be so bad. In fact, having a woman boss may have a positive impact on job satisfaction and other related outcomes.

---

Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Meetings, Arlington, Virginia, April, 1987. 2

The current study is an exploratory study of women secretaries' evaluations of their bosses and their jobs. Secretaries of both female and male bosses evaluated their bosses on a variety of personality and behavioral dimensions. They also evaluated the extent to which certain qualities (e.g., freedom, responsibility) were present or absent in their jobs.

The focus on secretaries was considered important for several reasons. First and most importantly, this occupational category represents the largest single concentration of female employees in the workforce. The National Commission on Working Women reported that in 1984, nearly one-third of all employed women worked in administrative support and clerical occupations. These jobs, while often undervalued, has been made essential by the growth of modern organizations. This is true despite the automation of many workplaces. The explosion of office technology, which has given both secretaries and managers new tools with which to work, has not eliminated secretarial positions. To the contrary, these technological advancements have made the actual tasks that many secretaries perform more complex.

To date most of the empirical work on sex and status in the workplace has been unidirectional. It has focused on the evaluation of subordinates by superiors--with the experimenters looking for the effects of sex on these evaluations (Hollander, 1985). There has been relatively little research investigating

the perceptions and evaluations of bosses by their subordinates. When these studies are undertaken, they can generally be found in one of two areas of research: 1.) Studies describing the managerial style of bosses and, 2.) studies measuring subordinates satisfaction with their bosses (Gupta, Jenkins, and Beehr, 1983). While most people believe that men and women behave differently in work settings (Brown, 1979), most of the evidence fails to support such beliefs (Bartol, 1977; Bartol & Martin, 1986; Day & Stogdill, 1972; Sashkin & Maier, 1971). Similarly, few consistent sex difference have been found in studies of subordinate satisfaction with their bosses (Adams, 1978; Bartol, 1975; Osborn & Vicars, 1976; Reif, Newstrom & St. Louis, 1976).

The results of a recent metanalytic review of 17 studies that examined sex differences in leadership indicate that "male and female leaders exhibit (identical managerial styles) and have equally satisfied subordinates (Dobbins & Platz, 1986, p. 118).

Certainly, the recognition of the reality of social hierarchies in the work place is important. Experience in one's roles imparts skill and knowledge as well as attitudes and beliefs that affect work related behavior. However, it is equally important to recognize that there is a reciprocal interaction between supervisors and their subordinates. The nature of their interdependent roles renders each reliant on the other for satisfaction of their goals.

In her landmark book, Men and Women of the Corporation, Kanter (1977) analyzed the structure and function of a large

organization, and how this affected the people who worked within it. In the chapter entitled "Secretaries", she examined in great detail the function of secretaries and how they fit into the larger organizational framework. She reported that one of the unique features of the relationship between secretary and boss is that the secretary's status and power are defined by the status of her (most secretaries are women) boss. Indeed, Kanter reported that secretaries are often rewarded not only for the skills and talents they possess, but for the formal rank that they hold and for their attitudes, personal dispositions and loyalty to their bosses.

In one of the few available empirical studies focusing on secretaries and their bosses, Stratham (1986) found that secretaries who currently have females supervisors rate this experience much more favorably than secretaries currently working for male supervisors. Overall, women supervisors were seen as more considerate, appreciative, competent, hard working and demanding. THese results generally confirmed the results of an interview study conducted by Stratham the previous year (Stratham, 1986).

Stratham also found that while secretaries of female bosses enjoyed working for them, boss sex was not predictive of overall job satisfaction. Secretaries were better off in some ways with male bosses and in some ways with female bosses. Secretaries of female bosses reported less overload and stress and greater likelihood of being included in decision making and long term planning. On the other hand, secretaries of male bosses reported

greater satisfaction with salary and fringes and a greater opportunity for advancement.

These differential satisfactions are easy to explain when one considers that males still occupy positions of greater authority in the workplace. The power and prestige of a male boss may in fact translate into better pay and benefits, or at least the perception that this is the case (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). A study of 7500 secretaries, bosses and other office workers was recently completed by Working Woman magazine (Kagan & Malveaux, 1986). They reported that of the 51% of secretaries who had a preference regarding sex of boss (N.B. almost half expressed no preference), most reported that would prefer working for a man. Of secretaries who were currently working for women, the preference for a male boss held, although it was diminished.

As women come to occupy more important and powerful positions within various organizations, they may acquire the responsibility to distribute more or greater rewards. Secretaries' experiences, job conditions, and satisfactions with or preference for female versus male bosses may be altered as power shifts within the workplace. In fact, controlling for boss status as was the case in the current study, it was anticipated that secretaries' of female bosses would be significantly more satisfied with their jobs and with their bosses. Further, this exploratory study examined the factors that are important in explaining satisfaction with job and with boss.

According to Schein (1984), when both superior and subordinate are women, the potential exists for an unusually

productive relationship as the woman boss may be less inclined to demean the role of another woman and more inclined to afford her respect and responsibility. Exposure to female bosses has been shown to reduce stereotypical thinking about their skill and competence, and it has led to increased preference for dealing with women (Ferber, Huber, & Spitze, 1979). "...It may be that the actuality of working for a woman is the best antidote to the expressed preference of subordinates for male bosses, a heartening possibility in a workworld which will be increasingly populated by women working for and with women (O'Leary, in press, p. 16).

## METHOD

### Subjects

The subjects were secretaries of 20 women and 20 men in the D.C. Metropolitan area. The women and men bosses were matched by the general type and size of their organizations. While this sample does not represent all managerial levels nor all types of business organizations, an acceptable cross section was achieved, THe types of organizations surveyed ranged form a 3 person interior design firm to a 250 member law firm.

There is, however, at least one risk to external validity. Women bosses for this study were identified through a national association of women business owners. The secretaries working for these women may have self selected into this role. For example, if they knew ahead of time that they really did not want

to work for a woman, they probably would not have interviewed with a woman business owner. This differs from the typical mid- to large-sized corporation where secretaries are often placed "by chance" with a male or female boss.

However, this very sample characteristic does provide the opportunity to control for power or status of boss to some extent. All the secretaries in the current sample worked for bosses who were high in status and thus capable of providing relatively equal organizational rewards, regardless of sex.

Procedure

Secretaries were contacted by telephone in order to determine their willingness to participate in a study concerning "women's relations with their bosses in the workplace." If they agreed to participate, they were mailed a copy of a self-administered questionnaire along with a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to return they survey. They were assured that their responses were confidential and anonymous and that this would not effect their job in any way.

Instrument

The survey instrument provide some general background information about the secretaries and about the organizations for which they worked.

There were two general evaluation questions which assessed overall work satisfaction with current boss and in current position. Each of these were rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied). In addition, measures of job characteristics, boss behavior and personal

characteristics of boss were included.

The Perceived Intrinsic Job Characteristics Scale developed by Warr, Cook and Wall (1979) was used to measure individual perceptions of the presence or absence of job characteristics theoretically expected to give rise to intrinsic job satisfaction. There are 10 items included in the scale. Secretaries responded to each item in a 5-point Likert-type scale in terms of the extent to which they perceived certain job conditions to be present: for example, attention given to suggestions that they made, the amount of responsibility they were given, and the opportunity to do a complete or whole piece of work.

A measure of Boss Behaviors was developed based on interviews with secretaries and on a review of several scales such as the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire developed by Cammann, Fishman, Jenkins and Klesh (1979) and the Leadership Opinion Questionnaire developed by Fleishman (1957). The secretaries rated the likelihood that their boss would engage in each of 24 behaviors. Typical items included "enables me to participate in decision-making, articulates expectations clearly, encourages growth, or blames me when something goes wrong." The likelihood of these behaviors was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "Very Likely to Very Unlikely".

A bipolar adjectival scale was designed to measure instrumental and expressive dimensions of boss' personality. Secretaries rated their bosses on 27 bipolar items such as dominant/submissive, considerate/inconsiderate, and good

leader/bad leader. Possible scores on each item ranged from -3 to +3.

Finally, two open ended questions were posed to each of the secretaries: "List the three things your like best about your boss" and "List the three things you like least about your boss". These items were used to supplement the quantitative data and to clarify those boss behaviors which secretaries value most and least.

## RESULTS

In order to assess the success of our attempt to match the women secretaries of women and men bosses on several key dimensions t-tests for independent samples were computed. There were no significant differences between the samples on size of business (although the men did employ a greater number of workers than women), length of employment (although again, the secretaries of men had worked for their bosses slightly longer than the secretaries of women--the overall mean was approximately two years), age of secretaries (although the secretaries of women were slightly older), and perception of work as career vs. job (although the secretaries of women were more likely to label their work as a career). One significant difference did emerge from these analyses. The secretaries of women bosses were more likely than those of men to work parttime ($t_{21,18}=2.09$, $p=.04$)..

Additional t-tests computed on the secretaries ratings of

their satisfaction with their bosses and their jobs failed to reveal any significant differences between the secretaries of women and men. However, the means for both measures favored women bosses over men (8.59 versus 7.63 and 7.41 and 7.10, respectively).

A significant difference was obtained between secretaries of women and men on the scale measuring core job dimensions ($t_{18,21}=2.2$, $p=.03$). Secretaries of women reported that their jobs involved greater task identity and task significance. Secretaries of women rated their tasks as significantly more worthwhile, as opposed to trivial ($p=.01$), indicated that their bosses paid more attention to their suggestions ($p=..05$), and that they were given more responsibility and opportunity to complete an entire piece of work rather than just a part ($p=.10$).

On the scale constructed to measure boss behaviors, secretaries of women reported that their bosses engaged in significantly more positive actions than the secretaries of men ($t_{18,21}=2.53$, $p=.02$). Women bosses were more likely to bring their secretaries flowers, express concern for their secretaries and inquire about their personal lives, and encourage their secretaries best efforts. Even when excluding personal gestures such as bringing flowers women bosses were rated as engaging in significantly more positive professional activities such as clearly articulating expectations and enabling participation in decision-making. In contrast male bosses were more likely than female bosses to lose their tempers and to expect their secretaries to work harder than they.

Although no significant overall differences in traits attributed to male and female bosses. However, examination of the individual scales comprising the personal characteristics of boss scale revealed that women bosses were rated as better leaders, better tempered, more supportive and loyal, less dominant and slightly less restrictive than male bosses.

Separate correlational analyses for female and male bosses on all scales and all scale items were computed with satisfaction with boss and satisfaction with position. Boss satisfaction and job satisfaction were highly correlated, r=.69 for males and r=.71 for females. For male, but not female, bosses time on the job and time with the boss had a significant positive relationship with boss satisfaction. Similarly, for male, but not female, bosses the job characteristic scale measuring skill variety, task identity, task significance and autonomy was highly correlated with both boss and position satisfaction (r=.72 and r=.82, respectively).

In contrast, perceiving one's boss as "similar to oneself" was significantly correlated with position satisfaction for secretaries of women, but not men (r=.72). Interestingly, most of the individual items on which there was a high correlation were relational rather than individualistic, i.e., loyal, supportive, and friendly.

Regardless of sex, boss behavior was positively related to satisfaction, although this effect was stronger for male than female bosses.

Finally, the results of a regression analysis to explain satisfaction with boss and satisfaction with position revealed that boss behavior and core job dimensions explained 66% of the variance in satisfaction with boss. Job characteristics reflecting task involvement alone were sufficient to explain 41% of the variance in satisfaction with position.

Two open ended questions were included in the questionnaire: What three things do you like best about your boss and what three things do you like least. Secretaries of women reported a greater absolute number of things liked best (N=55/40), whereas secretaries of men reported a greater number of things liked least (N=49/40). Interestingly, however, was the fact that the number of characteristics liked best and least by secretaries of men was identical.

Women working for women were almost three times more likely as women working for men to report that the things they liked best about their bosses were their knowledge, intelligence and experience; their ability to set reasonable deadlines and to articulate clear expectations; their leadership ability, ambition, and drive to excel; their thoughtful, warm, sensitive and courteous manner; their consideration and personal concern; and their generosity. Women working for men were tow and a half times more likely to mention that they best liked their bosses sense of humor than women working for women. No differences were obtained on participatory decision-making style, fairness, appreciation, or trust.

Secretaries of women were four times more likely than

secretaries of men to object to the absence of clear performance expectations, and their bosses tendencies to be critical and blaming. In contrast, secretaries of men were two and a half times more likely to least like their bosses for failing to plan ahead,being forgetful and disorganized. In addition, they were twice as likely to dislike their bosses' moodiness and four times more likely to dislike his displays of temper. The degree of dissatisfaction evidenced by secretaries of men for their moods and bad temper is interesting in light of the stereotype of women as emotional; men as cold and rational. Apparently, moodiness and anger in the workplace are not viewed as indicative of emotionality, at least when exhibited by men. However, even though tempernentality is seen as distinct from emotionality it is not positively valued. One secretary of a woman in the sample noted that one of the things she liked best about her boss was the fact that she did not lose her temper.

## DISCUSSION

The overall pattern of results obtained clearly suggests that women who work for women like both their bosses and their jobs. Indeed, it appears that women who work for women enjoy an advantage over women who work for men in that they are more likely to be provided the core job characteristics, such as task identity and task significance that lead to experienced meaningfulness of work and result in job satisfaction. The fact that secretaries of women bosses view their jobs as more

worthwhile, and see their suggestions taken more seriously than secretaries of men bosses indicates that women's process achievement orientation (Veroff & Sutherland, 1985) in the workplace may provide a structure which enhances task outcomes for their women subordinates.

The interpersonal concern of women which results in their behavioral commitment to maintaining positive personal relationships with their secretaries as evidenced by bringing them flowers, inquiring about their personal lives, expressing concern for them as individuals, treating them with consideration, and encouraging their best efforts may culminate in a context congenial to the secretaries enhanced performance. It is interesting to note that preliminary analyses of secretarial behaviors suggest that the interpersonal concern of their women bosses is reciprocated. Secretaries of women are more likely to report discussing their personal lives with their bosses, complimenting them, and acting sensitive to their needs than are secretaries of men. Furthermore they are more likely than secretaries of men to describe themselves in stereotypically feminine terms, perhaps because they their (women) bosses permit or encourage them to be cooperative, soothing, less tough and less responsible.

To the extent that women bosses structure their secretaries work in such a way as to recognize their individual significance in the work environment, it is not surprising that their secretaries report themselves to be satisfied with both their bosses and their jobs. Indeed, this structure appears to be

independent of the specific behaviors that women bosses exhibit, as satisfaction with women bosses is independent of core job dimensions. In contrast, for secretaries of men, both boss and position satisfaction depend upon job characteristics.

Although only those who have women bosses want may want them, increasing numbers of women and men are going to find that they have women bosses whether they want them or not. The results of this study clearly suggest that contrary to the myth, working for a woman has some advantages as measured by satisfaction with position.

Boss sex may actually mediate the relationship postulated by Hackman and Oldham (1976) in their job characteristics of work motivation model between core job characteristics such as task identity and task significance and critical psychological states such as experienced meaningfulness of work leading to high job satisfaction and perhaps high internal work motivation, quality of performance and low absenteesim and turnover. To the extent this is so, boss sex, or perhaps more aptly boss gender becomes a significant structural variable in the organizational context. Certainly our data are sufficiently suggestive to warrant further exploration along these lines.

References

Adams, J.S. (1976). The structure and dynamics of behavior in organizational boundary roles. In M.D. Dunnette (Ed.), Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Bartol, K.M. (1974). Male and female leaders in small work groups. Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Michegan State University, East Lansing, MI.

Bartol, K.M. (1977). The sex restructuring of organizations: A search for possible causes. Academy of Management Review, 3, 805-815.

Bartol, K.M. & Butterfield, D.A. (1976). Sex effects in evaluating leaders. Journal of Applied Psychology, 61, 446-454.

Bartol, K.M. & Martin, D.C. (1986). Women and men in task groups. In R.D. Ashmore and F.K. DelBoca (Eds.), The Social Psychology of Male-Female Relations. New York: Academic Press, 259-301.

Brown, S.M. (1979). Male versus female leaders: A comparison of empirical studies. Sex Roles, 5, 595-611.

Cammann, C., Fichman, M., Jenkins, D. & Klesh, J. (1979). The Michigan organizational assessment questionnaire. Unpublished manuscript. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Day, D.R. & Stogdill, R.M. (1972). Leader behavior of male and female supervisors: A comparative study. Personnel Psychology, 25, 353-360.

Dobbins, G.H. & Platz, S.J. (1986). Sex differences in leadership: How real are they? Academy of Management Review, 2, 118-127.

Ferber, M., Huber, J. & Spitze, G. (1979). Preference for men as bosses and professionals. Social Forces, 58, 466-476.

Fleishman, E.A. (1957). The leadership opinion questionnaire In Stogdill, R.M. & Coons, A.E. (Eds.). Leader Behavior: Its Description and Measurement. Bureau of Business Research, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Gupta, N. Jenkins, G.D., Jr., & Beehr, T.A. (1983). Employee's gender, gender similarity, and supervisor-subordinate cross evaluations. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 8, 174-184.

Hackman, J.R., Oldham, G., Janson, R. & Purdy, K. (1975). A new strategy for job enrichment. California Management Review, 17, 57-71.

Hollander, E.P. (1985). Leadership and Power. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), The Handbook of Social Psychology. New York: Random House.

Kagan, J. & Malveaux, J. (1986, May). The uneasy alliance of boss and secretary. Working Woman, 105-109, 134, 138.

Kanter, R.M. (1977). Men and Women of the Corporation. New York: Basic Books.

National Commission on Working Women. (undated). Secretaries and Clerical Workers: A Fact Sheet. Available from the National Commission on Working Women, 2000 P Street, N.W. Suite 508 Washington, D.C. 20036.

O'Leary, V.E. (1987). Women's Relationships with women in the workplace. In Gutek, B.A., Larwood, L. & Stromberg, A. (Eds.), Women and Work: Volume 3. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Osborn, R.N. & Vicars, W.M. (1976). Sex stereotypes: An artifact in

leader behavior and subordinate satisfaction analysis? Academy of Management Journal, 19, 439-449.

Sashkin, M. & Maier, N.R. (1971). Sex effects in delegation. Personnel Psychology, 24, 471-476.

Schein, V.E. (1985). Organizational realities: The politics of change. Training and Development Journal, 39, 37-41.

Stratham, A. (1985). The gender model revisited: Differences in the management style of men and women. Unpublished manuscript, University of Wisconsin, Parkside.

Stratham, A. (1986). Women working for women: The manager and her secretary. Unpublished manuscript, University of Wisconsin, Parkside.

U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Labor Statistics, (1986).

Warr, P.B., Cook, J. & Wall, T.D. (1979). Scales for the measurement of some work attitudes and aspects of psychological well-being. Journal of Occupational Psychology, 52, 129-148.